DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 281 FL 016 444

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TITLE Foreign Language Houses and Their Role in the Foreign Language Curriculum.
PUB DATE Nov 85
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (19th, New York, NY, November 28-30, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Second Language Programs; *Dormitories; French; German; Higher Education; Immersion Programs; *Intensive Language Courses; *Living Learning Centers; Minicourses; Program Content; Program Design; *Program Effectiveness; Second Language Instruction; Spanish; *Summer Programs
IDENTIFIERS *University of Nebraska Lincoln

ABSTRACT

The Summer Language Houses (SLH) in French, German, and Spanish at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have been extremely effective in teaching language skills and encouraging students to continue language study. The five-week intensive language programs at the second-year level emphasize oral communication but provide practice in all language skills. Daily activities and classes are in the target language on weekdays, and weekends are free. Summer tuition is charged, and all 62 students live, dine, and have classes informally in one house with a house parent and two graduate student instructor/counselors. The program is advertised on campus, through regular school mailings, and through interviews published in the local newspaper. The staff includes one coordinator, three individual language directors, and three graduate teaching assistants or instructors for each language. Special guests for each language also participate. The teaching and testing methods are varied. The SLH has been found to be a good setting for students to become comfortable with their chosen language and to become aware of other languages and language use opportunities. It is an affordable alternative to travel abroad, and it allows the faculty to experiment with curriculum and teaching methods. (MSE)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE HOUSES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (19th, New York, NY, November 28-30, 1985).

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Foreign Language Houses and Their Role in the Foreign Language Curriculum

INTRODUCTION:

The strongest motivation for students to learn a foreign language comes from being placed in the position of communicating with people who are able to speak the language being learned. Many students will attest to the thrill of expressing their ideas in a foreign language and of being able to understand it when spoken by the instructor, another student or a native speaker. By immersing a student in a foreign language, he is forced to use the vocabulary and expressions of the new language in a meaningful way, which eventually enables him to think in the language.

Lilian L. Stroebe, founder of the first Middlebury summer language school, emphasized the need for constant practice in the mastery of a foreign language as early as 1915.[1] According to Stephen A. Freeman, former director of the language schools at Middlebury, "the original announcement of the German School, established in 1915, stressed that 'mastery of a foreign language comes only by constant practice.'"[2] Freeman wrote:

> Constant practice meant especially outside of class, using non-academic language, the vocabulary of dormitory and personal life, extracurricular activity, and recreation.
>
> A language under these circumstances becomes habitual, then subconscious, students begin to dream or to pun in the language. They begin to forget how something is said in English.[3]

Even though the Middlebury schools continued to stress this approach to language learning pioneered in 1915, up to the 1950's the emphasis of foreign language study in the U.S. tended to follow the traditional path of studying the written language with little emphasis on its oral aspects. With the National Defense Education Act of 1958 the learning of foreign languages shifted in emphasis to oral communication. Some forms of immersion programs in a foreign language became increasingly popular in the 1960's on many campuses throughout the U.S. Language camps, summer institutes, intensive language courses, study abroad programs and language houses were some of the ways of experimenting with the curriculum to improve language teaching by immersing students in the foreign language.[4]

During three consecutive summers, 1982-1984, I directed and coordinated a remnant from the immersion period years, the French, German and Spanish Summer Language House at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UN-L), sponsored by its Department of Modern Languages and Literatures.

The purpose of my paper will be to describe the Summer Language House Program I directed, with emphasis on the Spanish House, and to offer some conclusions as to the role of the House in the foreign language curriculum.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The Summer Language House (SLH) is a five-week long intensive program of study at the second-year college level in the language of the student's choice. Although the emphasis of the program is oral communication, the program provides students with an opportunity to gain practice in developing all of the language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. All activities are conducted in the language being studied. Special

dining facilities and living accommodations give participants added practice in conversation. It is an experience in living the language.

Mornings are devoted to grammar review, conversation and reading classes. Afternoons provide special classes, drills and practice sessions. In the evenings there are films, visiting lecturers and group activities. Weekends are free so that students may return home to visit, although some of them stay at the Language House. The weekend break provides a respite from the intensity of the program.

COST

Summer tuition fees are charged for the program. In the summer of 1984, in-state students' tuition was $241.55, while out-of-state students paid $541.00. The cost of room and board was $289.00.

Students with legal dependents may be excused from the residence requirement, but they must eat lunch and dinner with the group.

PHYSICAL SETTING

One of the advantages and innovations of the SLH is that the curriculum is taught in an informal setting, quite different from the traditional foreign language classroom. The Alpha Delta Pi House is located in the extreme north boundary of the UN-L campus, next to a dormitory complex and one of the school's cafeterias. The distance between the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and the SLH is approximately one mile.

The building itself is an attractive compound three stories high which houses 62 students, the "house parent" and two live-in graduate student/instructor counselors. The "house parent" has an office and an adjacent bedroom on the main floor. The counselors stay one on each floor to assist students with their assignments and to solve problems that may arise.

There is a lobby in the building, furnished with three sofas, tables, chairs, and a piano, where students congregate to chat or to sing folksongs before going to eat lunch or dinner each day. Also, there is a T.V. room, used for video programs, and a kitchen.

However artificial, it is important to create an atmosphere which immerses the students in the language being studied. In the case of the Spanish house, posters, pictures and signs are used to decorate the walls. Spanish newspapers, comic books, magazines, books and games are scattered on top of the coffee and end tables located in the lobby and meeting rooms. In front of the House there is an open grass field where students can play soccer or other sports as a group.

Classes are held in several meeting rooms around the House. The rooms on the first floor are furnished with casual contemporary round wooden tables, chairs, sofas and coffee tables. For lack of funds, the rooms on the ground floor have a mixture of contemporary and school type furniture. Students sit informally in class, some on the chairs around the tables, some on the sofas and others on the floor.

PUBLICITY

The methods used to advertise the 1984 Summer Language House were: 1) distributing fliers to language classes and professors' mail boxes, 2) posting fliers on bulletin boards all around the campus, 3) mailing fliers to outside of campus students requesting information about the House, 4) mailing fliers through campus mail to other departments in related areas, 5) visiting language classes to talk about the program, 6) distributing fliers to prospective freshmen language minors and majors, 7) enclosing fliers in the yearly package distributed to high school students during the Nebraska Language Fair Day, 8) publishing interviews

with Language House students and instructors in the local newspaper during the summer session, 9) posting of fliers on the Language Floor, a university residential area for students interested in languages.

STAFFING

During the years I directed the SLH, the staff consisted of one coordinator, three individual language directors and three graduate teaching assistants or instructors per language.

The coordinator of the SLH was usually a faculty member who also acted as the director of one of the Houses. The coordinator and the directors, usually faculty members, were responsible for facilitating the recruitment of students, administration of the program, and the preparation of syllabi.

The criteria for selection of SLH staff was as follows: 1) good teaching record, preferably with experience at the intermediate level, 2) language skills, 3) native or near-native pronunciation, 4) graduate student, graduate teaching assistant or instructor status, 5) special skills, such as playing musical instruments or knowing how to play a sport, which would be helpful in cultural activities, 6) willingness to live in as "house parent."

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Each language invited several guests to give presentations during the evening hours. Some of the guests that participated in the Spanish Language House included:

-a professor of Spanish, who talked to the students about the Spanish program at UN-L and about career opportunities with foreign languages.

-a professor of bilingual education, herself a native of Mexico, who talked to the students about life in her native country

-four foreign students attending UN-L who chatted with students about their respective countries: Cuba, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and Spain

-a Spanish graduate instructor who gave a presentation on a year long trip she took with other professionals around South America [5]

-a Mexican instructor who introduced students to Spanish folk dancing

-a former graduate instructor from UN-L who had recently completed a master's degree in international business at the University of South Carolina

Usually all guests were invited to eat lunch or dinner with the students at the university cafeteria.

PLANNING

Planning for the SLH began in December of the previous year. Each year a contract was drafted between UN-L and the Alpha Delta Pi Corporation to rent the Alpha Delta Pi Sorority House for the following summer. Several months before the summer pre-registration, the teaching staff was selected. During the spring semester, the prospective teachers of Spanish, French and German had several group meetings to work on publicizing the program, scheduling courses, selecting textbooks, preparing syllabi and general information sheets, selecting guests, and planning activities, sports, films, slides, audiovisual materials and the decoration of the physical setting.

SCHEDULING

An example of the Spanish Language House schedule read as follows:

Morning:

8:00- 9:00 a.m.	Breakfast (Students only)
9:00-10:00 a.m.	Grammar Review (Spanish 201-202 L)
9:00-10:00 a.m.	Grammar Review (Spanish 203-204 L)
10:00-10:30 a.m.	Break
10:30-11:30 a.m.	Reading and Conversation (Sp. 201-202 L)
11:30-12:00 noon	Break

Afternoon:

12:00-12:45 p.m.	Lunch as a group (all instructors and students)
12:45- 1:15 p.m.	Break
1:15- 2:15 p.m.	Reading and Conversation (Sp. 203-204 L)
2:15- 2:30 p.m.	Break
2:30- 3:30 p.m.	Composition (Sp. 201-202 L/203-204 L)
3:30- 4:00 p.m.	Break
4:00- 5:00 p.m.	Zarabanda (two days per week), video programs, drills, special classes, etc.
5:00- 5:30 p.m.	Break
5:30- 6:15 p.m.	Dinner as a group (all instructors and students)
6:15- 7:30 p.m.	Break
7:30- 8:30 or 9:30 p.m.	Films (one per week), slide presentations, guests, sport activities (on Mondays)

TEACHING METHODS

The approach used to teach the regular class meetings was eclectic. Classroom material and assignments were combined purposedly so that the students not only learned theory, but also practiced what they had learned. Role playing, skits, short plays, poetry readings, etc. were incorporated

into the class material very successfully. One year, for instance, the students had a theater evening during the last week of classes which included two short plays, three monologues and poetry readings.

Students were instructed to use the target language at all times: during classes, meals, and outings; in conversation with each other and with guests. When a student inadvertently used an English word or expression, he or she was fined a nickel. The money collected was used for an end of the program dinner. Students were permitted to use English only when talking with members of the other language classes.

AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS

To reinforce the material learned in class the Spanish House spent an hour and half twice a week in the afternoons viewing the program Zarabanda which was broadcast through the Nebraska ETV network. The program included a series of episodes in the life of a young man trying to better himself by moving to a big city in Spain. Intermingled with the episodes were grammar lessons and pronunciation exercises.

During the evening programs, the instructors utilized slide projectors, tape recorders, record players, film strip projectors and video cassette recorders to expose the students to other aspects of the Spanish culture. Once there was a slide presentation of a complete bullfight. Another time, filmstrips, cassettes and records reproduced the sights and sounds of several Spanish towns. By means of a video cassette recorder, for example, students were able to enjoy a program on the running of the bulls in Pamplona and samples from some Spanish soap operas.

A guitar was usually brought to the Language House by one of the instructors to introduce the students to several Spanish folk songs.

There were a total of twelve foreign language movies shown in the Language House. Because of the small amount of money available, most of the films were not recent. Some of the selections included in the Spanish House were: Hand in the Trap, an Argentinean movie depicting in a suspenseful way the last days of a tycoon; Los tres caballeros, a Walt Disney movie that takes several of the Disney characters on a trip through Latin America; The Roots, a series of three stories devoted to depict the life of the Central and South American Indians in conflict with the European way of thinking; and The Garden of Delights, a Spanish movie that shows the efforts of a family to collect the inheritance of a man crippled in an auto accident.

EVALUATION OF STUDENTS

To evaluate the level of the students, a diagnostic test, the MLA Cooperative Spanish Language Examination (Level M, version A) was given during the first day of classes. The results of the test were used to place the students in their proper class level.

Also, students were evaluated by means of: 1) regular quizzes, usually one per week, per class; 2) the completion of both their oral and written assignments; 3) their attendance record and 4) their willingness to use the target language and participate in the extracurricular programs.

At the end of the program, students were given version B of the same MLA diagnostic test administered during the first day of classes to see how much they had improved after five weeks of exposure to the language. The raw scores of the writing test in a 203-204 L Spanish class ranged as follows:

	Pre-Testing (MA)	Post-Testing (MB)
Student 1	75	94
Student 2	60	79
Student 3	58	84
Student 4	56	70
Student 5	53	71
Student 6	40	70

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

Halfway through the program, students filled out written mid-term instructor evaluations which were used to ascertain any problems of instruction that might arise and to re-direct the teaching strategy of each class. During the last week of classes, students were asked to give a final evaluation of the instructors and of the program as a whole. Based on their evaluation of the Spanish Language House, the majority of the students, if not all of them, liked the program and considered it an invaluable experience. Some examples of their comments in 1984 were:

-"It was great! I had a wonderful time and learned a lot too."

-"I really had an enjoyable learning experience in the Language House. I think that I probably learned more here than if I would have taken two semesters."

-"Overall, I'm very, very happy with this five-week course and everything I learned ... incredible!"

-"I am unable to think of enough superlatives to describe the help which the 'Spanish House' has been in regard to being able to communicate in the language."

-"I certainly enjoyed myself at the Language House. I feel that the needs of every student were met."

-"I thought it was an excellent program.... I learned so much I can't believe it, and with the experience I had speaking, I feel much more comfortable with the language."

INFLUENCE OF THE SPANISH HOUSE ON THE STUDENTS

The total enrollment in the Spanish Language House in 1982, 1983, and 1984 was 42 students. Of those 42 students, 16 (or 38% of them) took two or more courses in Spanish; 7 (or 16.6%) eventually became Spanish majors, and 6 (or 14%) participated in the university's study abroad program.[6]

THE SLH AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

The SLH is a unique and interesting intensive program of study at the second-year level which deserves to have a place in the foreign language curriculum. For the student, it is an excellent way to acquire and practice foreign language skills. The informal atmosphere lessens the tension found in traditional classroom activities. Furthermore, it offers the student opportunities to communicate in the foreign language and apply skills being studied. This constant practice allows students to immerse themselves in the language and helps them to gain confidence in expressing themselves in it.

Being in contact with speakers of other languages, a student also notices the other languages used in the House. The evening films and slide presentations, the visiting lecturers and the group activities

make the student aware of other peoples' points of view, career opportunities, potentials in languages and the need for cooperation among different cultures.

The SLH offers an affordable program of study for those students who cannot travel abroad. It also provides an excellent preparation for students who want to spend a semester or two abroad participating in junior year abroad programs. Being a second year language program, it fulfills the language requirement for some students who, after a rewarding experience at the SLH, decide to continue studying the language of their choice. Consequently, these students increase the enrollment in the higher level courses.

For the teacher, the SLH offers an opportunity for experimenting with the curriculum and with new methods of teaching. The SLH program can be articulated with the Teacher's College Practicum for high school foreign language teachers.[7] It can also be used to provide a testing ground for high school or college foreign language teachers who participate in proficiency certification workshops in the summers through a state's department of education.[8]

In conclusion, the SLH program is extremely effective in teaching language skills and in encouraging students to continue their study of languages.

Notes

[1] Peter Binzen, "Taking the Middlebury Pledge," Change 10.1 (1978): 43.

[2] Malcom G. Scully, "The Middlebury Approach: Immersion," The Chronicle of Higher Education 12 December 1977: 12.

[3] Ibid.

[4] For a more detailed explanation of the shift in curriculum and some of the programs and innovations it brought about see for example: Roger Pillet, "Part II: Reading and Foreign Language. 'What's New in the Curriculum,'" Nation's School 84.2 (1969): 41-42. Lorraine A. Strasheim, "Foreign Language: Part of a New Apprenticeship for Living," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals 54.342 (1970): 88. Howard B. Altman and Richard I. Brod, "Foreign Language: College and University Foreign Language Programs — New Forms, New Emphasis, New Content," Change 10.1 (1978): 28-29. Dorothy J. Holby, "Creative Teaching of Foreign Languages: Techniques for Making Languages Come to Life," Chicago Schools Journal 44 (1963): 320-22. K. Hyatt and Sarah L. Aloisio, "It's the Atmosphere that Counts: Total Immersion in a Foreign Language," The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals 54.344 (1970): 72-78. Charles J. Sugnet, "Language Learning in a Supportive Environment," Change 10.1 (1978): 38-41. Richard L. Littlefield and Edward F. Spencer, "A Variety of Approaches to Living-Learning," NASPA Journal 11.1 (1973): 43-51. F. Sachs, "Living Spanish Beyond the College Classroom," Hispania 48 (1965): 318-23. J.M. Spillane, "Language Institutes Show the Way," Journal of the National Education Association 53.5 (1964): 25-26. G. K. Haukebo, "The Next Best Thing to Being There ... Language Camps," Minnesota Journal of Education 44.9 (1964): 14-15. Jean S. Griswold, Foreign Language Camps at the College

Level (Eric, 1983) (ED 233602). Vern G. Williamsen, "Pilot Program in Teaching Spanish: An Intensive Approach," Modern Language Journal 52 (1968): 73-78. Gertrude Marti, "Intensive French Experience: Some Observations and Results," French Review 45 (1972): 1145-51. Donald D. Walsh, "New Maison Française," French Review 39 (1965): 309-10. R.H. Shaffer and D. A. Ferber, "Language Houses: Middlebury College," Indiana University School of Education Bulletin 41 (1965): 19-21.

[5] The instructor brought slides and different objects she had collected during her trip. The students were fascinated by her accounts of the difficulties of crossing the jungles of Colombia.

[6] A Language House Report completed in the fall of 1980 by a committee of UN-L professors and students shows the following figures for the years 1976-80:

Total enrollment in Spanish House, 1967, 77, 78, 79, 80:	73
Number of students who took at least one more course:	20 (27%)
Number of students who took two or more ... courses:	13 (18%)
Number of students who ... declared Spanish majors:	6 (8%)

Language House Committee, "Language House Report" (Department of Modern Languages and Literature, UN-L, fall 1980): Appendix II.

[7] Although not implemented, a plan to articulate the SLH regular program with the Teacher's College Practicum for high school foreign language teachers was drafted in the "Language House Report" prepared in 1980. The report states:

> The plan provides for an initial three-week period of intensive language/cultural instruction and practice for Practicum participants, to be supervised by the Language House Director for each language. Beginning in the third week of SLH, Practicum participants will begin to conduct classes at

> regularly scheduled time periods under the supervision of S. Hahn [Teacher's College representative] and language house directors. (1)

[8] During the summer of 1983, students from each house participated in a workshop for proficiency testing where they were interviewed in the foreign language. This workshop was organized by the Nebraska State Department of Education to certify high school or college foreign language teachers in proficiency testing.